

**timesunion** <http://www.timesunion.com/business/article/Beech-Nut-eyed-for-government-offices-if-village-11723699.php>

## Beech Nut eyesore eyed for shared government offices

ADVERTISEMENT



IMAGE 1 OF 31

View of the Beech-Nut building, on Wednesday Mar. 2, 2011 in Canajoharie, NY. The plant is scheduled to close for good at the end of March, with its workforce transferred to a new state of the art plant in Montgomery County. ( Philip Kamrass / Times Union ) [less](#)

### *Canajoharie*

The polluted, partially demolished Beech Nut plant in Montgomery County could become consolidated government offices, under a \$10 million plan being eyed by the county as part of the state government consolidation program.

But that vision also depends on voters in the historic 188-year-old village ending its legal existence and merging into the town.

Montgomery County is one of six counties statewide taking part in the \$20 million Municipal Consolidation & Efficiency Competition, a state [Department of State](#) program. The state will pick a winner based on which county can save the most money by consolidating its local governments.

The county is proposing to use \$10 million to rebuild a portion of the sprawling, 27-acre Beech Nut plant, now partially demolished and tainted with toxic asbestos site. The plan calls for new offices for local town courts, the County Sheriff's [Department](#), township police, and municipal vehicle repair.

"It is our number one project under the application," said [Andy Santillo](#), a spokesman for [County Executive Matthew Ossenfort](#). "We are feeling very optimistic."

But that plan also relies on the voters in the 2,100-person village voting to dissolve their government, and be absorbed into the larger, predominantly rural township.

The plan was part of an application to the state by the county in February. The state narrowed the field to six counties in July, and is expected to select a winner sometime in September, said Santillo.

ADVERTISEMENT

"We are looking at this," said Canajoharie Francis Village Mayor [Francis Avery](#). "We will have to research this more thoroughly."

The village operates a water and sewer system, and has its own police force; the town of Canajoharie does not have such services.

In 2015 most of the village was listed on the [National Register of Historic Places](#) as the Canajoharie Historic District, due to its importance as a transportation hub and the well-preserved architecture from different eras.

This month, the [Montgomery County Legislature](#) voted to begin tax foreclosure on the Beech Nut facility for more than \$2 million in unpaid property taxes owed by would-be Ohio developer [Todd Clifford](#).

Clifford bought the shuttered plant from Beech Nut in 2013 for \$200,000, promising to redevelop it, but his workers instead stripped it of valuable scrap metal and left piles of asbestos-tainted debris lying in the open air. Clifford then walked away, claiming in December 2014 to have sold the property to business associate [Jeffrey Wendel](#). Unpaid taxes began to pile up and the factory and offices began to slowly fall into disarray.

This spring, EPA workers sprayed the debris piles and factory walls with sealant to prevent asbestos fibers from blowing around in the air.

If the county forecloses, it plans to begin cleaning up the asbestos piles for proper disposal.

The county plan to the state describes the consolidation of the village and town as "critical for economic development." It estimates the merger could reduce governmental costs by up to \$330,000 in the first year, due to transferring local police duties to the county Sheriff's Department.

© 2017 Hearst Communications, Inc.

**HEARST**

